

AN AMERICAN WOMAN AMONG THE ZUNI INDIANS.

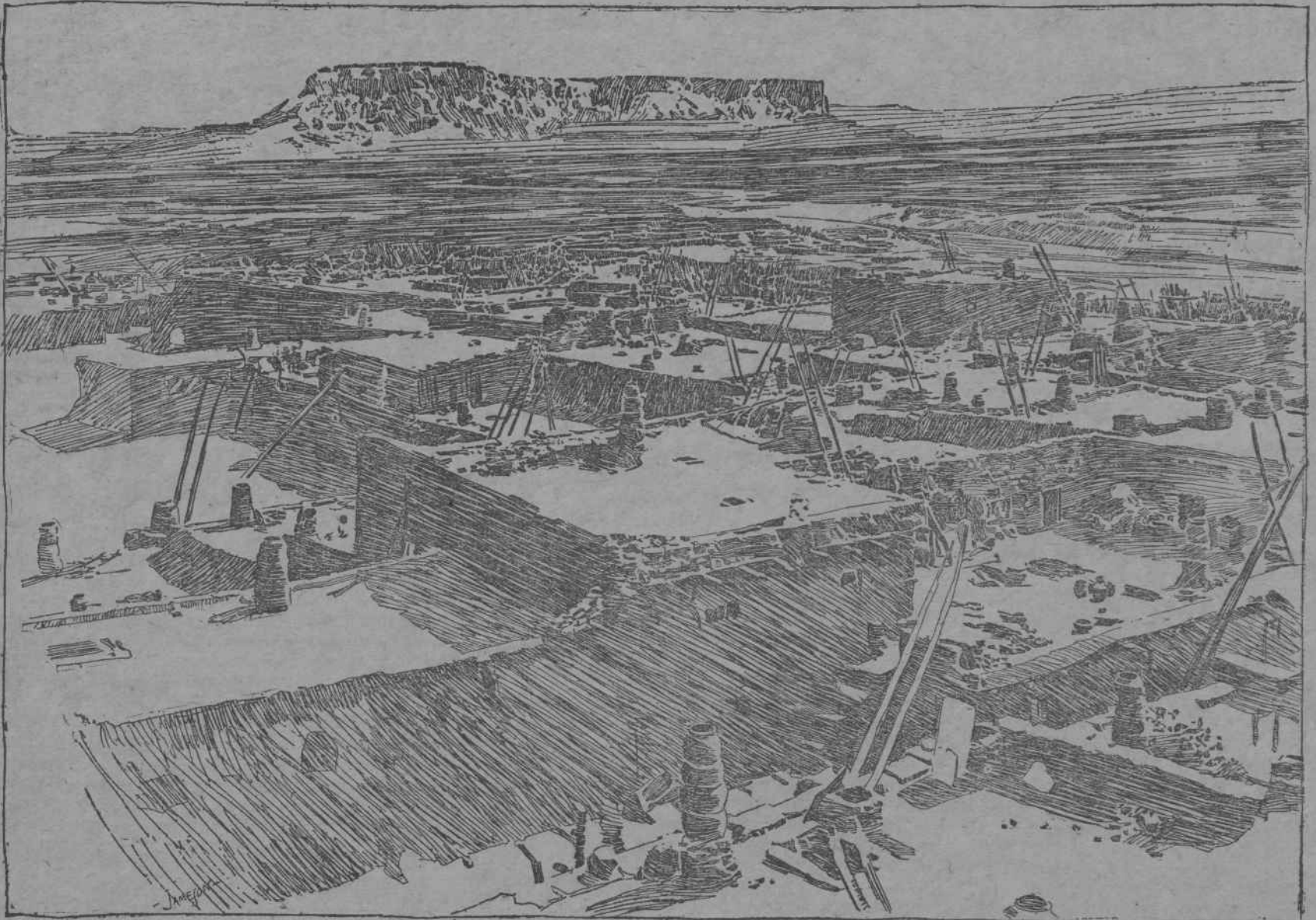
By Matilda Cox Stevenson.

MY interest in the Indians is one of my earliest recollections. From my grandmother, who in the early days of this century collected some interesting relics of Mohawk civilization and other tribes of New York, I inherited an intense love for these children of the forest and plain. My first researches were made before I had yet reached my teens, and in my early girlhood I positively devoured all works relating to the ethnology of the North American Indian. After my marriage to the late Colonel James Stevenson, one of the most effective workers in this branch of science which the century has produced, I devoted my entire life to this line of study, making a specialty of the Indians of the Southwest.

Since 1879 I have been a constant student of the tribes that lie between the Rio Grande and the Pacific coast. I have had several years' experience in the field both before and since the death of my husband. Following on the lines laid down by English ethnologists, my researches have been entirely of a practical order. In order to know the myths, the religion, the customs and the

allay their fears. Finally I got one old priest to whom my husband and I had rendered many favors to commence the mask of the Raingod. He worked faithfully all day, and I was congratulating myself on my success, when, in the middle of the night, I was aroused by knocking at the door and sobbing and weeping. I asked what was the matter, and found the old priest in much tribulation. He said to me: "Good mother, I cannot make the masks. I have just been troubled with a dream, in which the god has said that I cannot enter the spirit lake if I make for the white face the sacred clothes of the gods." Dismissing him with quieting assurances that I was not angry at his defection, in the morning I went to work on new lines. Right here, I may say, that money was no temptation to them when asked for such a favor.

By the utmost persuasion, by fitting out the young priests in gorgeous tailor-made clothes, by presenting the tribes with yards of the most brilliant material to be worked into more striking raiment for the next feast, after five months' of pleading and argument I obtained my desire and completed a col-



THE MESA SITE OF OLD ZUNI.

sociology of the Indian, I believe that for the nonce one must become an Indian.

My residence with these Zunis dates from 1879. Since then scarcely two years have passed in which I have not spent five or six months in their pueblos. I have now just returned to Washington after living since last July in their pueblo.

This has been the most successful of my visits. I brought back a collection of masks which cannot fail to be of incalculable value both to the student and the dilettante. They are symbolical of the mysteries which influence the life of this people.

While I am not prepared to assert it as fact, yet I am inclined to think this myth has many points that seem to mark it as a corruption of the story of Adam and Eve. The references to the fields of ice and snow and the lofty mountains traversed lead others to jump at the conclusion that the Zunis came from Northeast Asia and crossed Bering Strait. But this I am not yet prepared to support, as other explanations can be given.

Last October I was present at the great feast of the Council of the Gods. Its ritual is most impressive. The feast begins by the priests leaving the town and hiding in the mountains. Thence they come arrayed in the masks and other sacerdotal paraphernalia, each representing some particular hero of the ancestral legends. While clothed in these masks and garments the Zunis believe that these men are inhabited by the spirits of the gods, and during the whole celebration the people render them divine homage. We can have no conception of the sanctity with which these men are temporarily clothed, and the awe they inspire in the simple minds of their believers.

After having seen the gorgeous splendor of the priestly masks and paraphernalia, I realized how valuable a collection of them would be for the National Museum. I approached the priests of the tribe, whose duty it is to make these garments, and pleaded with them to reproduce a set for me. They tremblingly refused, saying that their ancestors would curse them, and stating that all their treasures were mine, but the sacred garments of their gods could never go out of their tribe. They explained that when the priest wore these garments the great father and mother of all the dead Zunis and all the little children that were gathered to the "happy land" came back to the village and conversed with the dear ones left behind. When I insisted that I did not want the sacred clothes, but just some exactly like them, even that did not

lection of these masks and garments. From an ethnological view this collection is worth at least a million dollars, as it is doubtful if it could ever again be secured in such completeness.

Another achievement of which I am particularly proud was to obtain a copy of the "Ettone," or sacred fetish of the Raingod. The old priest that made it for me wept all the time he was employed on its manufacture, and warned me that if every any of his tribe came to visit Washington that the "mother" must hide the fetish, or the consequence to himself would be very serious. One of the most unique ceremonies of the Zunis occurs in midwinter, and is known as the dance of the "knife swallows." This particular ritual is a prayer for snow or winter rains. Every warrior who participates in this mystery must possess a wooden knife whose blade will reach from the tip of his middle finger to the hollow of his elbow. During the ceremonies he must swallow this clear to the hilt. This heroic act is supposed to exercise a great influence on the Sungod and propitiate him so as not to prevent the fall of rains or snow or to dry up the crops during the next Summer. As a great mark of esteem and affection, the society of knife swallows invited me to become a member and to be initiated into all its mysteries, including the swallowing act. So urgent were they in their invitation that my only escape was to have the medicine man look at my throat and declare that it was not made like the Zuni throats, and that I should choke to death if they persisted in their good intention.

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